

“Go to sleep to get rid of the fright”:

Colombian Youth’s Experiences with Community Violence Exposure

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Abstract

This honors thesis focuses on Colombian children's exposure to violence. Specifically, this study examines the different types of violence that poor Colombian children are exposed to, the frequency and impact of talking to adults about violence, and the presence of desensitization as a response to chronic violence exposure. Additionally, the impact of children's age and gender will be explored across these topics. Participants consist of 29 students (15 5th graders and 14 10th graders) attending a charter school in a low-income neighborhood in Bogotá, Colombia. The data are drawn from an existing set of qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted with each student. The most frequent types of violence experienced by children and adolescents in the community were thefts, sports violence and drug violence. Communication with a supportive adult played a major role in relieving children's feelings of distress after an incident of community violence. On the whole, the qualitative findings add to our understanding of how youth in Colombia understand and cope with community and political violence exposure based on their own subjective accounts. Finally, the findings can also be used to improve interventions that target children that are exposed to community violence.

Keywords: adolescents, children, Colombia, community violence, desensitization, Latino

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Colombian Youth’s Experiences with Community Violence Exposure

Community violence is an important public health problem in Colombia, a country with a long history of widespread political and community violence. As an economically stratified country, there is also a marked division between low-income and middle-income neighborhoods, which facilitates the concentration of violence in the poorer areas of the country (Esbjorn & Pérez Fjalland, 2011). Colombia has a rate of 96 homicides per 100,000 people, making homicide one of the leading causes of death (Duque, Klevens, & Ramirez, 2003). In addition, violence is prevalent in both rural and urban areas throughout Colombia (Human Rights Watch, 2010). This study examines the different types of violence to which poor Colombian children are exposed, the frequency and impact of talking to adults about violence, and the presence of desensitization as a response to chronic violence exposure. The impact of children’s age and gender will also be explored across these topics.

Political Violence

For over 40 years Colombia has had violence caused by guerilla groups, organizations that manage drugs and take control of neighborhoods. In 1996, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was created as an opposition movement and since has become the largest guerrilla group (Amnesty International, 1994). The harvesting and selling of illegal substances within the country has increased the violence from guerrillas. Between 1997 and 2007, this resulted in 10,000 deaths (Sánchez, 2007) and the displacement of over 3 million people (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2008). Guerrilla groups use murder, rape, threats and extortion against civilians and human rights groups if they do not comply with their demands (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Because guerrillas take control

of neighborhoods, children are exposed to violence from an early age either from direct exposure as victims and witnesses or through family members and explicit media depictions of political violence (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The government has tried to eradicate guerrilla groups by demobilizing members and facilitating reintegration programs, but these organizations have been able to expand to other municipalities by recruiting children at an early age (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Thus, starting at very young ages, Colombian children are exposed to inordinately high rates of community violence. Consequently, some propose that Colombia is steeped in a culture of violence due to the high rates of political, community and economic violence.

Community Violence

The most common incidents of community violence in Colombia are thefts and gang related crimes, which include barras bravas (Martnez, 2006). “Barras bravas” are groups of soccer fans or “hooligans” who harm or threaten people who support a different team. Violence related to barras bravas is one of the most prevalent types of violence that Colombian children are exposed to on a frequent basis. This type of organized violence started in the city of Medellín in 1989 (Martnez, 2006). Pablo Escobar, a powerful drug cartel boss, financed the Atlético Nacional, one of the most recognized soccer teams in Colombia. There were five main soccer teams during these years. Drug traffickers controlled 80% of the teams, which brought together political problems and soccer communities (Martnez, 2006). In 1994, Andrés Escobar, a well-known soccer player, was killed after his return to Colombia from the World Cup. Because of the substantial rivalry that each cartel created between teams, soccer gangs became part of the culture of Colombian sports. Thus, violence caused by barras bravas has become a common type of violence to which youth are frequently exposed.

Psychological Responses to Community Violence Exposure

An abundance of research documents an association between children's exposure to community violence and negative emotional and psychological symptoms among U.S. youth. Violence exposure is associated with internalizing problems, such as depression, anxiety, separation anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, as well as externalizing problems, such as deviant and aggressive behavior, in children and adolescents in the U.S. (Cooley-Quille, Boyd, Frantz, & Walsh, 2001; Gorman-Smith, Henry, & Tolan, 2004; Lynch, 2003). Furthermore, personal victimization is associated with traumatic stress even when other symptomatology and demographic variables are controlled (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998). In a recent meta-analysis, Fowler and colleagues (2009) reported that community violence exposure is most strongly associated with PTSD symptoms than any other symptoms. Symptoms of PTSD may include decreased interest in after-school activities, constricted affect, and re-experiencing the traumatic event during play and sleep (Ceballo, Ramirez, Hearn, & Maltese, 2003). Moreover, among adolescents between 16 and 18 years old, Cooley-Quille and Lorion (1999) found that community violence exposure was associated with sleep disturbances. In this study, most participants experienced occasional sleep disturbances and there were no differences by age or gender.

Another potential consequence of community violence exposure is emotional desensitization. Over time, youth living in dangerous, urban communities may become numb or desensitized to violence because it is so chronic and commonplace. Children and adolescents may experience anxiety and depressive symptoms initially, but subsequently evidence less emotional distress because they become accustomed to the violence around them (McCart et al., 2007). The term "pathologic adaptation" to violence has been used to describe the feelings of numbness, decreased psychological distress, and resulting desensitization that sometimes

accompany chronic exposure to community violence (Schwab-Stone et al., 1995). For example, in a longitudinal study with African American sixth graders from an urban public school, children's anxiety scores were one standard deviation below the measure's published norms despite high levels of violence exposure (White, Bruce, Farrel, & Kliever, 1998). Similarly, McCart and colleagues (2007) showed that youth who were more frequently exposed to violence had lower levels of distress, which may reveal desensitization to violence.

Researchers have proposed three models of adaptation to violence: (1) The vulnerability model of multiple exposures to traumatic events; (2) cognitive coping theory and functional theory of emotions; and (3) adaptation (Ng-Mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Stueve, 2004). The vulnerability model posits that exposure to community violence will lead to more affective and behavioral problems. The vulnerability model is generally studied alongside PTSD, and shows a relation between violence exposure and psychological distress or violent behavior. The cognitive coping theory and functional theory of emotions model predicts that being exposed to violent events will allow children to develop the ability to cope with distress and increase immunity against violence-related stressors. In other words, children become familiar with violent events, allowing them to develop coping skills and decrease stress levels. According to the theory of adaptation, community violence will produce distress if experienced at relatively low levels, but greater exposure to violence will cause an adaptation to violence such as children's emotional desensitization to violence.

Other research also documents desensitization to community violence exposure. Cooley-Quille and Lorion (1999) showed that adolescents who experience violence more frequently had lower resting pulse rates, indicating that they might be desensitized to violence. After frequent exposure to violent events, children may not display a normal "fight or flight" reaction to signs

of danger such as gunshots or police sirens (Cooley-Strickland et al., 2009). Adolescents with frequent community violence exposure may not express more externalizing behaviors than adolescents with low levels of exposure since adolescents with frequent community violence exposure might show desensitization to violence (Cooley-Quille et al., 2001). Furthermore, adolescents with high levels of exposure might go through a process of desensitization as a way of adapting to frequent pain and loss. However, other studies contradict desensitization theories, finding that children report anxiety, fears, and somatic complaints in response to violence, suggesting that they have been emotionally affected (Cooley-Quille et al., 2001). It is possible that this discrepancy in the literature is due to varying rates of community violence exposure among different samples of youth. Given the high rates of community violence to which many Colombian youth are exposed, this study aims to shed light on whether youth exposed to extremely high rates of community violence describe becoming emotionally desensitized over time.

Protective Factors

Protective factors can mediate the impact of community violence exposure on children. Groves (1993) proposed three main factors that affect the extent to which community violence exposure impacts children: (1) witnessing violence versus personal victimization; (2) familiarity with the victim; and (3) the presence of a caretaker at the violent event.

Witnessing versus victimization. Studies have found that children may have different reactions when they are witnesses versus victims of community violence exposure. As cited in Bacchini (2011), children who witness violence may have positive attitudes and opinions regarding the use of violence, while children who are victims most often suffer emotional distress and biases in processing social situations. Witnessing violence may involve a social

learning process in which violent problem solving becomes acceptable (Bandura, 1986), and violent reactions are encouraged. Children who are victimized by violence show difficulty thinking about social problems (Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994) and the consequences of their actions. Such difficulties may affect emotion regulation and result in worse psychological outcomes (Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006). Fitzpatrick (1993) found that victimization was associated with depressive symptoms while witnessing community violence was not. On the other hand, Freeman, Mokros, and Poznanski (1993) found that there was no difference between the effects of witnessing violence and being a victim of violence on depressive symptoms.

Familiarity with the victim. Children often know the victims or the perpetrators involved in violence that occurs in their neighborhoods. In a study with over 1,000 children in Chicago, 39% mentioned knowing victims of violence. When there were shootings, they reported knowing the victims 50% of the time (Bell & Jenkins, 1993). Likewise, in a sample of 5th and 6th graders, the likelihood of experiencing depression increased after events in which children knew the victim or the perpetrator, but depression was not more likely when the violence involved strangers (Richters & Martinez, 1993). Additionally, relationships to victims as peers, family members or friends will have psychological effects on children. Symptoms of anxiety and melancholia are more likely when the victim is a child's family member than when the victim is a stranger (Kliewer, Murrelle, Mejia, de Torres, & Angold, 2001). Addressing differences in the impact of witnessing violence versus being a victim of community violence may be important in understanding the psychological aftermath of violence.

The presence of a caretaker. The presence of a caretaker can mediate the effects of community violence exposure, because adult caretakers can influence the way children make sense of the world. Supportive adults might help decrease PTSD symptoms, because adults

might offer a sense of security and protection (Kliewer et al., 2001). The presence of peers may not have the same effect, because peers are not perceived as figures of protection. Gorman-Smith and Tolan (1998) found that the detrimental effects of community violence exposure can be attenuated if an adult is a supportive figure during a violence event, rather than when an adult is not present or not calm during the event. This study will explore Colombian youths' experiences with the presence of an adult during an incidence of community violence.

Relationships and communication with caretakers. Research on parenting styles in Latino families is scarce (Domenech, Rodríguez, Donovanick, & Crowley, 2009). Among Latinos, the term "family" includes not only parents and siblings, but extended relatives as well. Cultural values such as respect, *educación*, and *familismo* are highly valued among Latinos (Cruz-Santiago & Ramirez Garcia, 2011), which might make research based on American parenting styles not suitable to this population (Domenech et al., 2009). Ceballo, Kennedy, Bregman, and Epstein-Ngo (2012) found that poor Latino parents engaged in strict monitoring of their children, which may serve as a mechanism to protect children in more dangerous neighborhoods. In poor urban neighborhoods, Latina mothers frequently monitored who their children talked to and were friends with, and they restricted children's outside play and visits to friends' houses (Ceballo et al., 2012). Parental monitoring may be a protective factor in dangerous communities because children are less exposed to violence and become less involved in delinquent activities (Pettit, Bates, Dodge, and Meece, 1999). Indeed, Ceballo and colleagues (2003) found that children with stricter parental monitoring had lower rates of exposure to violence as both victims and witnesses. In addition, children who reported stricter monitoring reported fewer symptoms of depression and hopelessness. However, among children who experienced the highest levels of victimization, strict monitoring did not moderate the relation between community violence exposure and

psychological well-being (Ceballo et al., 2003). Parental monitoring might not have a protective effect on children who experience high levels of community violence exposure against symptoms of anxiety or depression (Gorman-Smith et al., 2004).

These results demonstrate the harmful impact of community violence exposure on the development of children's relationships, independence and sense of security and safety. However, another protective factor may be parent-child communication. Ceballo and colleagues (2012) found that 63% of the Latina mothers in their sample thought that communication with children was important and complemented their use of strict monitoring. Mothers emphasized the importance of being open and honest with their children about violence, drugs, and gangs in order to know what their children are exposed to. Moreover, for these mothers, monitoring was not only physical but emotional as well; they often asked their children about their thoughts and feelings (Ceballo et al., 2012). Children who talk about violence with a supportive adult may experience less detrimental consequences after exposure to violence than children who do not speak to anyone. Having good communication with a parent may protect children against negative emotions associated with violence exposure. Moreover, open communication in families has a positive effect in helping children cope with trauma (Duncan, 1996). In addition, talking with understanding and supportive adults may give children a sense of safety, which can prevent externalizing and aggressive behaviors. According to Duncan (1996), parents who give meaning to traumatic events and talk with children about their feelings help children cope with trauma. In one study, children who had more positive relationships with their parents displayed fewer symptoms of PTSD (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor 1995). This study seeks to understand how frequently Colombian children and adolescents report talking with parents, other adult

family members, and peers as a potential protective factor in the aftermath of community violence exposure.

Gender Differences

The literature documents substantial gender differences with regard to community violence exposure. First, there are gender differences in the frequency and severity of incidents to which boys and girls are exposed. Second, community violence affects boys and girls in different ways such that differences are found in the way that children react to violence. Different symptoms of PTSD or desensitization might develop in different ways depending on the gender of a child. Lastly, the extent to which protective factors act as a defensive mechanism can also vary by gender.

Researchers have found gender differences in the exposure, severity and frequency of community violence exposure that girls and boys experience. Studies demonstrate that males, in general, report witnessing more violent events than females (Selner-O'Hagan, Kindlon, Buka, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1998) and these events tended to be more frequent and severe (Singer, Anglin, Song, & Lunghofer, 1995). Similarly, other researchers found that boys more frequently witnessed and were victims of violent events than girls (Bell & Jenkins, 1993).

For PTSD symptoms, some studies do not find gender differences following community violence exposure (Pynoos Frederick, Nader, & Arroyo, 1987), while others find significant differences (Attar & Guerra, 1994). Richters & Martinez (1993) found that girls and boys showed similar PTSD symptoms, but girls tended to have more internalizing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. There is evidence that gender differences exist in the development of PTSD symptomatology in which females might be more vulnerable than males to the effects of victimization (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993). However, there may also be age

differences in susceptibility to PTSD symptoms. Duncan (1996) states that susceptibility is related to age and developmental issues; more specifically, younger children are more susceptible to trauma. Finally, there are gender differences in the degree of parental monitoring that may contribute to youth's exposure to community violence. For example, Bacchini (2011) found that girls receive more monitoring than boys and therefore, boys experience higher levels of community violence exposure.

The present qualitative study will address the following sets of research questions: 1) what types of community violence are children in Colombia exposed to? 2) How do Colombian youth understand different types of violence? Do these understandings vary by gender? 3) How often do children experience community violence in the presence of an adult? 4) How often do children talk to adults about their experiences with community violence (especially when adults were not present at the violent incident)? Is talking usually helpful to children? 5) Do Colombian youth demonstrate signs of being desensitized to community violence? Does this vary by age or gender?

Method

Participants

This study is part of a project that included 30 children in low-income neighborhoods attending a public charter school in Bogotá, Colombia. Although 30 children were interviewed in the original sample, the final sample consists of 29 interviews due to a recording error. Participants in the 5th and 10th grade were interviewed. They had a mean age of 10.9 years and 15.7 years, respectively. Among the 5th graders, there were six girls and eight boys, and among the 10th graders, there were five girls and 10 boys.

Procedure

The principal investigator, graduate student Traci Kennedy, presented information about the study and answered students' questions in all 5th and 10th grade classrooms in the school. Recruitment letters and consent forms were provided to all 5th and 10th graders to be given to their parents. All research materials were translated from English to Spanish, and later back translated from Spanish to English by bilingual native Spanish speakers. All students who returned consent forms, regardless of whether or not they received parental consent to participate, were compensated with a small gift as a token of appreciation for considering participating in the study, per school personnel's requests. Fifth graders received a small notebook and pen, and 10th graders received a set of bracelets of their choice. All children who participated in the study returned signed consent forms.

The principal investigator conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews in Spanish in a designated, quiet office. A trained, bilingual, Colombian research assistant was present during the duration of each interview and provided interpretation as needed. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim by bilingual research assistants. Bilingual research assistants also checked the transcriptions for accuracy, and then translated the interviews from Spanish to English.

Measures

The qualitative interview protocols consisted of 39 questions for 5th graders and 38 questions for 10th graders. The interview protocol included questions covering the following broad categories: a) neighborhood descriptions, b) violence frequency and chronicity, c) severity, d) vicarious victimization, e) political and drug-related violence, and f) beliefs and attitudes about violence.

Sample questions for each of these topics are as follows: a) “Most neighborhoods have good aspects and bad aspects. What are some things you like about your neighborhood?” b) “Please give me an example of violence that usually happens at least once per week.” c) “Tell me about the worst violent or scary event you have ever seen or experienced in your neighborhood.” d) “Tell me about the worst time you saw or heard about violence against a family member or a close friend.” e) “How often do you see or hear about armed conflict/guerrilla violence?” f) Why do you think violence happens in your neighborhood?” Follow-up questions were asked throughout the interview to probe for additional details and to ensure accuracy of understanding. The interview protocol for 5th graders is attached in Appendix A.

Supplementing the interview questions, 5th graders were instructed to draw two pictures over the course of the interview answering the questions, “What are you afraid of in your neighborhood?” and “Draw a picture of how the violence in your neighborhood makes you feel.” Children were then asked to describe and elaborate on each of their drawings verbally. The drawing task was included to provide younger children with the opportunity to express their experiences nonverbally, as well as to provide a more indirect means of sharing sensitive information with the interviewer (Moser & McIlwaine, 2000).

Coding Procedures

The qualitative data analysis was based on a method of “analytic induction” in which the establishment of categories draws from previous research, followed by an identification of recurring themes in the interviews (Patton, 2002). Using this method, the categories are first established by relying on prior research with the goal of identifying recurring themes in children’s exposure to violence and their understanding of it.

The codebook was created in two phases. During the initial phase of coding, categories were established based upon previous research. During the second phase, line-by-line readings were conducted to identify additional themes. The goal was to identify recurring themes in children's exposure to violence and their understanding of violence. Once codes were established, a codebook was created defining specific categories to be coded within each theme and providing examples within each category.

Another undergraduate research assistant and I coded all of the interviews. We were first trained on coding procedures and completed practice interviews to establish inter-rater reliability. We engaged in in-depth discussions with the principal investigator regarding discrepancies in our coding. During this practice phase, the codebook was refined and elaborated to clarify coding instructions. Once we, as coders, reached reliability with the expert coder, we proceeded to code the 29 interviews for eleven categories and themes. The coding of 59% of the interviews had an inter-rater reliability above 80%. In the next section, a description of all 11 themes/categories coded in the interviews is provided.

1) Common community violence exposure. Interviews were coded for the most frequent type of violence that children reported experiencing at least once per week (or with the greatest frequency reported). Responses to the question, "Please give me an example of the violence that usually happens once per week," were coded. Participants' descriptions of common community violence exposure were coded into the following categories: robbery (e.g., theft, mugging, being held up); stabbing (i.e., the use of a knife to harm someone); shooting (e.g., the use of a gun, someone being shot and killed, hearing gunshots); hitting (e.g., hitting, punching, being beaten up); sports team fights (e.g., conflict between "barras bravas"); gang violence (e.g.,

conflict between territorial gangs of individuals); other (i.e., other type of community violence); and missing (i.e., no answer was provided, or the question was not asked) .

2) Worst community violence exposure. The description of the worst instance in which participants experienced violence was coded in response to the prompt: “Tell me about the worst or scariest violent event you have ever seen or experienced in your neighborhood.” Codes used for this question were the same as those described for common community violence.

3) Who with. Participants’ descriptions of who they were with when they experienced their worst incidence of community violence were coded. Assumptions were not made regarding who the child was with if it was not specifically stated. The categories included: alone, a parent, an adult family member, a non-family member adult, a sibling, peers or friends, and no response given (e.g., the question was not asked). “Alone” was only coded if a child stated that he or she was by himself at the time of the event. This theme was multi-coded to reflect all of the individuals whom a participant reported were present at the time of the violent event.

4) Worst witnessing/victimization. This category described whether the child was a witness or a victim in the worst incident of community violence reported. The codes were: witnessed the event, personally victimized, heard about the event secondhand only, and no response given (e.g., the information was not available in the interview). Participants were coded as having witnessed the event when he or she saw or heard the event unfolding, or was present during or shortly after it happened (e.g., a child saw a body in the neighborhood after a person was murdered). Participants were coded as having been personally victimized if he or she was the victim of the event directly. Finally, participants were coded as having heard about the event secondhand when the child learned about the event from others, but was not present at the time it happened.

5) Talk worst. Interviews were coded for whether the child did or did not talk to anyone after the worst instance of community violence exposure reported. This category was coded based on participants' responses to the question: "Did you talk to anyone about it?" The codes for this theme were: no (participant stated explicitly that he or she did not talk to anyone about it), yes (participant stated explicitly that he or she did talk to someone about it), and no response given (e.g., the question was not asked).

6) Who talk. Interviews were coded for whom the child talked to after the worst instance of community violence exposure reported. This category was coded based on participants' responses to the question: "Who did you talk to?" The codes were: no one, mother, father, other adult family member, non-family adult, sibling, peer or friend, and no response was given (e.g., the question was not asked). "No one" was coded if the child indicated that he/she did not talk to anyone. This code was also given if a child previously indicated that they didn't talk to anyone after the worst community violence event. Peers and friends were coded if a participant talked to another person his or her age, including neighbors, classmates, or non-adult family members (e.g., cousins). This theme was multi-coded to reflect all of the individuals to whom a participant reported talking.

7) Talk help. Interviews were coded to indicate whether or not talking to someone about the worst instance of community violence exposure helped the child feel better. This category was coded based on participants' responses to the question: "Did talking about it help?" The following categories were utilized: no, yes, and not applicable/question was not asked.

8) Why neighborhood. This theme represented participants' stated beliefs about why violence occurred in their neighborhoods, and it was coded based on participants' responses to the question: "Why do you think violence exists in your neighborhood?" Participants' responses

were coded into six distinct categories. The first category included participants' beliefs that individuals cause neighborhood violence, simply because of bad intentions or specific individual flaws. The second category reflected the belief that families or individuals' upbringings are responsible for their engagement in violence. It was coded for family when the child talked about someone's upbringing or family situation as the reason why people are violent. The third category included reasons that may be conceptualized as due to societal issues, such as poverty, lack of education, or class issues. The fourth category referred to politicians or the government as the cause of neighborhood violence such as politicians' desire for power or money. The fifth category was used when participants explicitly stated that they do not know why violence exists in the neighborhood, and the sixth category was used when the question was not asked or no answer was given. This theme was multi-coded to reflect all of the causes of neighborhood violence that participants stated.

9) Why country. This theme represented participants' stated beliefs about why violence occurred more generally or in their country. This theme was coded based on participants' responses to the question: "Why do you think violence happens in general or in your country?" Participants' responses were coded into the same six categories used for the previous coding theme. Once again, these themes were multi-coded to reflect all of the causes of violence within the country that participants stated.

10) Good violence. This category was coded in response to the question: "Although many people believe that violence is bad, some people can believe that there are some good things about violence. Do you think there are good results of violence in your neighborhood or in your country?" Four codes were used: No, yes, ambivalent negative (might be good results, but mostly they are bad), and question was not asked; question was not answered. "No" was used

when children reported that there were never good results from violence. “Yes” was coded when children mentioned good outcomes from violence. “Ambivalent” was used when children mentioned both good and bad results, even if he or she mentioned more bad results than good.

11) Desensitization. Indications of “desensitization” or “normalization” to community violence exposure were coded. Three codes were used: absent, present, and no response given or unable to code. This category was coded as “present” when the participant used words or phrases indicating a lack of emotional response to community violence exposure. It was coded as “absent” when the child used words or phrases indicating a subjective emotional response to community violence exposure, either positive or negative, or indicated that the experience bothered him or her in some way. It was coded as “absent” if the child stated that the violence affected them in any way, even if it was for a short period of time. Coding for this category was based on the entire interview.

Results

The Colombian youth who were interviewed as part of the present study provided rich, powerful descriptions of their experiences with community and political violence exposure, as well as subjective accounts of their own reactions to and beliefs about violence. Using the qualitative coding procedures described above, five research questions were addressed.

Question 1: What Types of Community Violence are Children in Colombia Exposed To?

In recounting the types of community violence to which children and adolescents were exposed, the majority of participants reported experiencing community violence very frequently. Thirty-eight percent of the children reported that they experienced violence everyday, and 58% reported being exposed to violence at least once per week. Of the different kinds of violence identified, the most frequent types to which children were exposed were “other” types of

violence, thefts, and violence related to sports teams. Table 1 illustrates the frequency with which each type of violence occurred. The majority of violent events coded as “other” were related to individuals’ use of drugs or alcohol in the neighborhood. For example, a 10th grade boy said, “Every week would be the drunkards,” and a 5th grade boy said, “Well drug dealers in the street.” Drugs and alcohol may be reported as a frequent form of community violence because people wandering around might give children a sense of insecurity and because intoxicated adults can cause conflicts. A 10th grade boy explained the type of violence he saw: “Many the vices. The drug addicts that... that also sometimes the drunkards start to bother a lot. And no, and nothing else. There are the robbers and the addicts. Nothing else.” Children may think of adults who use drugs as a bad influence for other children. Other types of violence reported were arguments, threats, kidnappings, and home invasions.

Following violence exposure that fell into the “other” category, the next most frequent type of violence were robberies. Many youth reported being exposed to robberies on a daily basis. One of the 10th grade boys described the frequency of thefts as follows:

Sometimes daily. Basically sometimes daily. Let’s say that violence is made and let’s say and the conflicts return to like the same robbery. Because let’s say they are fighting and while they are entranced and the people that are there in the group look to see who neglects their business, the store, so they can rob. Then that is many times daily.

This exemplifies how frequently children experience community violence. Often, the robberies escalate into other types of violence, most likely including weapons such as knives and guns. As a 10th grade boy explained:

Yes...No. Let’s say here in Bogotá, let’s say one starts to count by neighborhood or by area, then from a hundred, there are eighty, sixty persons that are robbed daily. Daily,

every week like...also the conflicts between thieves are also daily and the people that are robbed, yes? Because many persons let's say, not to be robbed there is... a lot of people dead because of that, not letting them rob them. Yes.

Finally, 28% of the children reported violence involving groups of sports fans as the most frequent type of violence in their neighborhoods. A 5th grade boy explained the violence from the sports teams: "Let's say, here is my neighborhood, it is this one, and here around the little corner sometimes there are hooligan confrontations." Thus, across neighborhoods, children and adolescents in this study described a variety of types of community violence that occurred on a weekly basis. A 5th grade girl described what barras bravas are: "They are hooligans/fans of teams that...that start to break and hit people from the other teams because they...they get mad sometimes because their team doesn't win." In addition, a 5th grade boy explained: "Because the gangs provoke them. They send messages with other people until they say 'well let's go and if they come' or something like that. And they start to stab each other and so." Violence usually happens between opposite teams, but uninvolved people may become victims of this type of violence.

Gender differences emerged in the frequency with which boys and girls experienced each type of violence. For instance, 46% of girls were exposed to "other" types of violence (different from the ones identified in the codes), while only 22% of boys reported "other" types of violence. Similarly, girls had a greater frequency of exposure to stabbings, with 18% of girls reporting this type of violence, compared to 5% of boys. A 10th grade girl described a stabbing, "Around four years ago, there was a muchacho... then, I don't know... that simply because of the fact that they did not want to sell him beer, he stabbed a muchacho. Then, it was something like that it ... because of a simple beer, it's something like illogical. Something incoherent. But, and after he

was sent to jail and everything. Truthfully he did not come back to the neighborhood and I have not seen him again.” On the other hand, this is a description of a stabbing by a 5th grade boy: “The worst event I have seen was that two muchachos stabbed each other too and one cut the other’s arm. And the police came and separated them.” Finally, slightly more boys than girls experienced sports fights and violence, with frequencies of 38% and 9%, respectively. A 10th grade boy described a sports-related violent incident:

Well no, that one was with a fire arm, and the other was a conflict between two fans from two groups of hooligans, from two teams. Eh... the son of our neighbor, that is almost like my aunt, eh... he went down and when we heard like the ruckus with the mob there, people seeing the hooligans that that is when they went with fire ... with a knife then we ran down thinking it was the son of the lady and there we saw... well we say... the hooligans blood...all bloodied up and stabbed. It was the two worst we have seen... that I have seen.

In addition to these types of community violence that youth reported experiencing frequently, virtually all participants shared at least one instance of community violence exposure that they considered to be the worst they had experienced. As illustrated in Table 2, the types of violence that were described most frequently by participants as the worst included stabbings (48%), robberies (41%), and “other” types of violence (41%). As indicated by the high rates of each type of community violence, many events that youth reported involved multiple forms of violence (e.g., robbery and stabbing). An example of a stabbing seen by a 10th grade girl was:

That is why. For example, if it was an example. For example, one time I... I went out of my house with my mother and we were in the corner and in front there is an Internet café, then we were there and saw that this young man was coming out of the gate of the

Internet café and when he was coming out he came... a bunch of fans came and stabbed him. Then he had a shirt of Nacional [a soccer team], it was in that moment, yes, well then clearly it hurt me a lot because around then my brother he is... also is from the Nacional, then very addicted to the Nacional....

A 10th grade boy described a robbery: “And the ones who are hooligans, from fourteen, fifteen years old and up. They are a lot younger than one, with a giant knife that looks like a machete. They steal from you. The method is no longer on bike or on foot, but on motorcycle. And with a pistol, with a fire arm. But thank God that has not happened to me.” Finally, a 10th grade girl provided an example of “other” types of violence: “That is I did not see, let’s say, that he hanged himself, no. But I saw how they took the body, I saw the little rope because he did it in front of the window so everyone would see.” This is a description of a muchacho who received death threats and hanged himself in his window where people who passed by could see.

Question 2: How Do Colombian Youth Understand Different Types of Violence?

In light of the high rates of participants’ exposure to multiple forms of violence, this study further explored children’s understandings of the violence to which they are exposed. The most frequent beliefs about causes of violence in the neighborhood were due to individual (i.e., each person is responsible for his or her own bad actions; some people are just bad), family (i.e., people’s upbringing/families), and society (i.e., poverty; class issues; lack of education; unemployment). Indeed, 69% of youth believed that violence exists in their neighborhoods due to individual faults, such as bad intentions or greed. A 10th grade girl gave an individually-based explanation for violence:

Why it exists? Well at least the aggressive fans, that I really don’t understand that much because why get on a team to fight for it, then it’s like, what is that about? I don’t

know... Like a friend that was in the aggressive fans, that is like... it's like... like an addiction to the extreme that I will kill a person over a team like it doesn't have any logic. At least I am addicted like... to a novel and that but... I am not going to kill someone because she won't let me see it or something like that. It's like going to too many extremes. Too over there. That is the only thing I don't understand.

Another description of individuals causing violence was given by a 10th grade girl: "They let a lot of negative people influence them and many people that only have hate in their hearts and want to get back with that person with a pure heart, they want to do something good and they destroy it. I say that is what it is". As illustrated, many participants expressed confusion about why some individuals commit violence, concluding that there are some individuals who are simply aberrant or different from themselves in some way.

Twenty percent of the children cited family and people's upbringing as the primary cause of neighborhood violence. For example, one 10th grade girl contrasted a desirable upbringing from an undesirable one leading to a life of violence:

When you are a young person, they teach you not to be violent, to be moderate, to know what you are doing, you know what is right and what is wrong – well then you have the path to take. But equally there are things you see that influence you. And well all of a sudden also it is for... because the parents don't pay attention to their children, and well people grow up like that, and well they don't care about anything. If I was not important to my parents, how am I going to care about other people?

Some children reported society-based reasons for why violence happens in their neighborhoods. For example a 10th grade girl said, "Well because, one of its spheres it's because um... there is not work and there are a lot of people that have the necessity of uh... they rob out of necessity"

and a 10th grade boy said, “The already widespread economy of violence. What I was saying, lack of culture, since no one is educated for known, how this affects us to live, how these types of conduct affect the country. Well they will say it’s bad, but from there they don’t transcend”.

Following their explanations of the hypothesized causes of neighborhood violence, children also proposed reasons that violence exists in the country more generally. Of the reasons cited, the most frequent included individual, politicians and government, and “other” types of reasons. Similar to reasons for neighborhood violence, most children (59%) cited individual flaws as the cause of violence in the country. A 10th grade boy provided an example of this type of reason: “That is for aut... eh... autonomy of each one. Because each one decides if I am... if he is on the side of good or on the side of evil, and unfortunately Colombia is one of the countries where there is more people of evil than of good.” Thus, most youth interviewed attributed the widespread violence in their country to “bad people.”

The frequency of youth who blamed politicians and government was much lower (10%), as was the frequency for “other” types of reasons (6%). As a 10th grade girl explained:

You ask me about violence as such in the country... mmm the general things like the guerilla, the guerilla and drug addiction, as such. Well, I think personally that violence exists since the people in politics don’t give a fuck about, about what the people feel; they only care about the money and the power. Because well if a leader is good as such, well that person says no. Well on the one side is the money, but on the other side is the well-being of the community and my country. I think it is more like on that side, like an ambition for money and power that makes the violence... that is like the violence infiltrates the same as the money and the power.

“Other” reasons had a frequency of 6%. “Other” types of reasons were shown here by a child who attempted to explain intolerance of cultural diversity as the primary reason for violence in the country: “Because...because...they don’t have...an exact reason to...to not have violence because... because there are different like cultures in the country and they don’t understand each other well.”

Finally, along with their beliefs about the causes of violence, children discussed whether there are ever good results that follow violence in the neighborhood or in the country. Fifty-nine percent of children stated that there are no good results of violence, whereas 31% stated that there are good results of violence. Only two children were ambivalent and reported that there might be good results from violence, but results were mostly bad. One 5th grade boy explained why he thought there could be good results from violence: “Well the good ones are when they catch the bad people, with violence, but they catch them.” This is an example of an ambivalent reason given by a 5th grade boy:

Well because violence causes a lot of harm, and it can cause death, but for example, when they have to kill a person for good, well, it’s not so bad. Because it’s better to do good and so the person doesn’t suffer. For example, like the guerrilla, they had tried to kill them so they wouldn’t harm us, or anybody else. Well not only but the whole world.

Question 3: How Often Do Children Experience Community Violence in the Presence of an Adult?

In describing their experiences with community violence exposure, children provided details about whom they were with at the time of the events. Children sometimes experienced community violence alone, but most of the time children reported being with other people. During the worst community violence event that both 5th graders and 10th graders reported, only

14% of youth were by themselves. Children reported being with an adult 55% of the time, and with a peer or non-adult family member 34% of the time. Therefore, the majority of children experienced the worst community violence event in the company of an adult. The relationship between the child and adult varied. Parents were the most common adult present, with a frequency of 28%, followed closely by an adult family member (other than a parent) with a frequency of 24%.

Although girls and boys reported experiencing community violence in the company of a parent at equal rates, boys reported a slightly greater frequency of being with another adult family member (28%) than girls (18%). Another major difference was the frequency with which boys experienced community violence by themselves. Boys more often reported being alone at the time of the event (16%), while girls were alone only 9% of the time.

The frequency with which participants reported exposure to violence in the presence of adults also varied by age. Age differences were most significant for experiencing community violence in the presence of a parent, followed by the presence of a sibling and an adult family member. More 5th graders (40%) experienced the worst instance of community violence with a parent than did 10th graders (14%). Similarly, more 5th graders (27%) were with a sibling than were 10th graders (7%). Finally, more 5th graders (40%) also experienced the worst instance of community violence exposure with another adult family member than did 10th graders (21%). Thus, overall, younger, elementary-aged children more frequently experienced community violence exposure in the presence of others, especially adults, than did older adolescents.

Question 4: How Often Do Children Talk to Adults About Their Experiences with Community Violence? Is Talking Usually Helpful to Children?

Many youth in this sample talked to someone about the worst event of community violence they reported. Twelve children discussed the violence with someone, while six children did not talk to anyone about it. The question was not asked or answered by the remaining 11 children. All twelve children who talked to someone reported talking to their mothers. In addition to talking to their mothers, 5 also talked to peers or friends and 2 also talked to their fathers. Some youth emphasized the experience of talking with a parent or peer as a central part of their accounts of community violence exposure. For example, a 5th grade girl recounted, “Yes, with...with my mom and things like that. I tell you that because of she doesn’t let us go by ourselves anywhere or anything, she won’t let us go back by ourselves or anything.” This child’s description further highlights the importance of increased parental monitoring during the course of talking about violence exposure. In addition, she explained what her father said to make her feel better: “No, that he told me to relax that...that I was...since we were high [up] there was not much of a possibility of that happening to us.” In contrast, others mentioned talking about their exposure to violence as an afterthought. For example, a 10th grade girl said, “Uh... well yes, with the people that live close to me... in my class there are several people that live close to that... of, of my house and well also knew that and told me, ‘Oh, how come do you know about that?’ and I’m ‘yes, yes, I know.’” Therefore, this participant reported talking to others simply in recounting the event rather than as a coping strategy to attempt to feel better.

The greatest gender differences were found in the frequency with which males and females talked to someone after the worst event of community violence. Females talked to someone 55% of the time, while males talked to someone 28% of the time. The greatest differences by grade were found for children who did not talk to anyone. Thirty-three percent of 5th graders did not talk to anyone after the worst event of community violence compared to 7%

of 10th graders. A 5th grade girl described what she did instead of talking about it: “Mmm... Well forget about it.” Therefore, in some cases, younger children purposely avoided talking with others about the violence they experienced.

Children also reported whether or not they believed talking to someone was helpful. Results indicated that of the 12 children who talked to someone after the worst incidence of community violence, eight children reported that talking had helped them feel better. For instance, one 5th grade boy described whom he talked to about violence exposure: “Well sometimes with my mom... There with my mom. Everything with my mom.” He then explained, “Yes ma told me that it doesn’t happen that much anymore, that I need to conduct myself with caution and she buys me an ice cream.” On the other hand, a few of the participants specifically stated that talking about the worst community violence they experienced did not help them feel better. A 10th grade girl explained why talking did not help: “Not much. I am like very reserved in my feelings, I don’t tell everyone, no, I’m sad, happy, mad or furious. I am very quiet. That is, if I’m mad, I stay quiet. But I am not very demanding either, to put it some way, like let it go like anything, no?” In addition, she explained what did make her feel better: “It made me feel better to break a vase. I don’t know... it just that I was very... furious, my brother... since my brother was alone at home, then I got home and grabbed the vase and threw it.” Clearly, this adolescent resorted to releasing her anger physically rather than verbally.

Question 5: Do Colombian Youth Demonstrate Signs of Being Desensitized to Community Violence? Does this Vary by Age or Gender?

Desensitization to community violence exposure was not found for youth in this sample. None of the participants interviewed showed signs of desensitization. Some children reported feeling accustomed to violence or being able to forget about the incidents. However, all children

were emotionally affected by violence exposure. As one child stated after being asked how often he saw violence in the neighborhood: “In my neighborhood... well I am very used to it because... around... almost every day.” However, the same child reported feelings of distress about the very violence to which he was reportedly accustomed:

Because... yes because at least I can have a family member that is a drug trafficker and one day they come to kill him. Well, it's going to hurt me the same... that they, they at least robbed him, it's the same because of course, it's a... a member of my family and whatever they do it's going to hurt me. No matter what the case is it's going to hurt you.

Of course you are going to judge but that is on another parameter.

In other words, this child is saying that she is used to seeing violence almost every day in her neighborhood, but she is also saying that regardless of the type of violence, it would affect her.

Another example of emotional sensitivity amidst ongoing community violence was a 10th grade boy's explanation of how he felt after a violent event:

Go to sleep to get rid of the fright (laughs). To get rid of... to... to relax... also... also... one remains like dumb. And more so since the room in which we were sleeping was in front of that. Yes... then no, not calm at all.

Simultaneously, however, the fact that he laughed in recounting this experience suggests some level of normalization to the violence, such that he can describe it in a relatively lighthearted manner. In other cases, children can be both affected and show some normalization. One 5th grade boy explained how he felt during a violent event: “With fear, one remains still, stunned, with fright,” and after the event: “No, not anymore. Now, now... I didn't remember that (laughs).” On the whole, therefore, Colombian youth in this study described remaining emotionally affected by violence, despite reporting extremely high rates of violence exposure.

Additionally, children reported being witnesses in the worst violent event they have experienced 79% of the time. However, children and adolescents more often reported hearing about the worst violent event second hand than being a victim in the worst violent event. Thus, children do not necessarily have to be victims to be significantly affected by violence.

Discussion

This study draws rich interpretations about the types of violence to which youth in Bogotá, Colombia are exposed and how it affects them. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 29 fifth and tenth graders living in low-income neighborhoods in Bogotá. The categories coded in this study were violence frequency and severity, the presence of adults during children's exposure to violence, conversations with adults about violence, beliefs and attitudes about violence, and desensitization to chronic violence exposure. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the types and quality of violence to which youth in Colombia are exposed. Further, the qualitative findings add to our understanding of how youth in Colombia understand and cope with community and political violence exposure based on their subjective accounts. Finally, the findings can also be used to improve prevention and intervention initiatives that target children and adolescents who are exposed to community violence.

The findings revealed that Colombian children and adolescents experience various types of community violence. A majority of children experienced violence more than once per week, and a significant number of children experienced violence on a daily basis. The most common types of violence that children were exposed to fell in the "other" category, robberies, and sports team violence. Most participants who were coded as experiencing "other" types of violence described drug-related violence, conflict, and threats of violence. "Other" types of violence may

have been mentioned frequently because children felt unsafe walking around their neighborhood where people were using drugs.

Furthermore, the three most common types of violence described as the worst violence exposure were stabbings, robberies, and “other” types. What is most relevant about these findings is that there were gender differences in the frequency with which boys and girls experienced each type of violence. Although previous research has found that boys are more exposed to violence than girls, 46% of girls in this study reported experiencing “other” types of violence (in the “other” category), while only 22% of boys reported “other” types of violence. This particular finding may shed light into the types of activities that boys and girls do and the places they spend their time. In a similar way, girls were exposed to more stabbings (18%) than boys (5%), more thefts (36%) compared to boys (28%), and more “other” types of violence (45%) compared to boys (22%). In this study, boys described more instances of violence in a general way (e.g., “That hooligans hang out there,”), and girls described violence in a more specific way (e.g., “Well, the thing is... I will tell you about the stabbing. Well the truth is I don’t know what the reason would be, well then regardless I actually saw it and... anyway. Eh... no that was in a more, for a time more... a time more over there. Eh... but that was really it was a neighbor of course. Then well he was arriving with his mobile phone, he had it in his hand, he was listening to music... they came out, they grabbed him, or rather practically this is my house in this block and he was stabbed over here. No, the... well they took his mobile phone, or rather, he did not want to give it, then well nothing they stabbed him – they stabbed his face, they stabbed his body, the legs, they did not forget nothing”). Thus, the more nuanced descriptions of community violence that girls described may account for their higher rates of exposure in various categories. An alternative explanation is that girls found most types of community violence more

distressing than boys, and therefore described them as the worst experience of community violence. Boys experienced violence of sports teams much more frequently than girls, indicating that boys were more involved with sports groups and with larger social groups. Despite these gender differences, both boys and girls experienced inordinately high rates of violence across categories with 38% of the children reporting experiencing violence everyday, and 58% experiencing violence at least once per week.

Children and adolescents' understanding of why violence happens in the neighborhood and in the country were mostly centered on individual faults. Descriptions of these faults highlighted bad intentions, pure evil, or greed. Some descriptions mentioned drive for power, money, or control of others as characteristics of people who commit acts of violence. There were also differences between youths' descriptions of why violence exists in the neighborhood and why violence exists in the country. For neighborhood violence, several children provided reasons about personal decisions and environmental influences on people like where they grew up and lived. However, for violence in the country, youths' reasons were more about organizations that have control over people, such as the government and the drug cartels. Relatedly, many participants mentioned drugs as one of the most frequent types of violence, since guerrillas tended to cause a lot of internal conflict between drug cartels and the government.

In addition, boys were more often by themselves when they experienced events of community violence than girls. This is similar to what was found by Ceballo and colleagues (2011) where mothers reported engaging in less monitoring of boys than of girls. Scholars posit that this gender difference in parental monitoring may contribute to greater rates of community violence exposure among boys (Selner-O'Hagan, Kindlon, Buka, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1998).

A particularly interesting finding is that a majority of youth talked to someone after the worst community violence event; however, more children talked to their peers and mothers than to their fathers. In fact, all participants who talked with someone after the worst instance of community violence talked with their mothers. This primary reliance on mothers as the main source of support and protection against violence, particularly among Latino youth, is supported by previous research (Ceballo et al., 2012). However, support from peers and friends was not previously identified as a more frequent source of support than fathers. This might be because many families in low-income neighborhoods where the participants resided were headed by single mothers, so talking with a father about violence exposure may not be an option for many youth.

Contrary to my expectations, desensitization was found to be absent in all of the youth who participated. All of the children and adolescents talked about feelings of sadness, fear, or anger during an event of community violence. This finding confirms previous research on the development of PTSD, internalizing, and externalizing symptoms following children's exposure to violence (Lynch, 2003). Even though a significant number of youth reported having forgotten about violence and feeling accustomed to it, vulnerability to violence can be sensed in their qualitative descriptions of violence. The results of this study therefore reveal that Colombian children who were exposed to community violence experienced detrimental consequences. No matter the frequency with which children and adolescents experience violence, feelings of anger, sadness, and fear were present.

This literature contributes to prior research since there is a dearth of information on community violence exposure among youth in Colombia, and on the emotional impact of community violence on Latino populations outside the United States. While the qualitative

nature of the interviews is a particular strength of this study, providing rich, subjective accounts of Colombian youths' exposure to violence, it may also represent a limitation. For instance, because questions were open-ended, valuable information may be missing from questions that were not asked or not answered. In addition, the process of translation might lose important details and cultural meanings of words. Words in the original study might not have an exact translation, which makes the translated interviews prone to errors. Because all interviews were conducted in one school, children lived in neighborhoods near the school. As such, findings might not be generalizable to other populations living in different cities or different areas of Bogotá. In addition, there can be a difference between the amount of violence that youth experience and the actual amount of violence that is happening in a neighborhood. It could be important to know both in order to understand the direct effect of violence and the effect of the perceived violence, since there can be an interaction between both and therefore an influence on youth due to the interaction.

These findings also provide directions for intervention and prevention efforts for youth exposed to violence in Colombia. Since many youth in this study talked to a supportive adult after being exposed to violence and most found it to be beneficial, parents could be advised to communicate with children about the types of violence that are common in the community and the ways in which children can cope with it. These findings can also be used to inform parents about the extent to which children are exposed to violence so that they can take precautions. Finally, the results demonstrate that among this group of 29 Colombian children and adolescents, youth do not become desensitized to the constant violence they experienced in their neighborhoods, but rather continue to be emotionally affected. Therefore, even when children are thought to be accustomed to or used to the violence they saw in their neighborhoods, it is

imperative that they receive support and appropriate treatment to address the underlying emotional consequences of violence exposure.

The current study contributes to the literature in youth's exposure to violence by highlighting the types of community violence specific to Colombian children and adolescents. Little research has been done on the effects of violence on Latino youth, and far less research has been done with Latino populations outside the United States. This research may serve as a springboard towards understanding the unique challenges to which Colombian children and adolescents are exposed. For example, future directions stemming from this study might include conducting a longitudinal quantitative study with children in Colombia who experience high rates of community violence. A longitudinal study may shed light on long-term consequences of frequent exposure to community violence and highlight differences in how children's emotional reactions and understanding of violence change over time. Additionally, a complementary qualitative study could be conducted in other cities of Colombia to provide a broader understanding of Colombian youths' experiences with violence exposure. Likewise, a comparative study could be implemented among Latino youth in the United States or elsewhere to better understand cultural similarities and differences in the ways in which Latino youth experience, understand, and cope with different types of violence exposure.

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Table 1

Common Community Violence Exposure

Types of Community Violence Exposure	Total	
for full sample	<i>N</i> =29 (%)	
“Other”	11	(37.9%)
Robbery; theft; mugging	10	(34.4%)
Sports team fights/violence; “barras bravas”	8	(28%)
Stabbing	3	(10.3%)
Hit; punch; beat	3	(10.3%)
Not asked; no answer was given	2	(6.8%)
Gangs fights or violence	1	(3.4%)
Shooting; hearing gunshots	0	(0%)

Types of Community Violence Exposure	5 th grade	10 th grade
by grade	<i>N</i> =15 (%)	<i>N</i> =14 (%)
“Other”	6 (40%)	5 (35.7%)
Robbery; theft; mugging	5 (33.3%)	5 (35.7%)
Sports team fights/violence; “barras bravas”	3 (20%)	6 (42.8%)
Stabbing	3 (20%)	0 (0%)
Hit; punch; beat	2 (13.3%)	1 (7.1%)
Not asked; no answer was given	1 (6.6%)	1 (7.1%)
Gangs fights or violence	1 (6.6%)	0 (0%)
Shooting; hearing gunshots	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 2

Worst Community Violence Exposure

Types of Community Violence Exposure	Total	
for full sample	<i>N</i> =29 (%)	
Stabbing	14	(48.2%)
Robbery; theft; mugging	12	(41.3%)
“Other”	12	(41.3%)
Shooting; hearing gunshots	6	(20.6%)
Sports team fights/violence; “barras bravas”	5	(17.2%)
Hit; punch; beat	5	(17.2%)
Not asked; no answer was given	1	(3.4%)
Gangs fights or violence	0	(0%)

Types of Community Violence Exposure	5 th grade	10 th grade
by grade	<i>N</i> =15 (%)	<i>N</i> =14 (%)
Stabbing	8 (53.3%)	6 (42.8%)
Robbery; theft; mugging	6 (40%)	6 (42.8%)
“Other”	9 (60%)	3 (21.4%)
Shooting; hearing gunshots	2 (13.3%)	4 (28.5%)
Sports team fights/violence; “barras bravas”	2 (13.3%)	3 (21.4%)
Hit; punch; beat	2 (13.3%)	3 (21.4%)
Not asked; no answer was given	0 (0%)	1 (7.1%)
Gangs fights or violence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Appendix A

Colombia Qualitative Interviews Protocol

Elementary-aged Children

Begin interview with introductions and assent. Then engage in a brief activity (play with an interactive toy or game) with the child while talking about his/her interests to increase his/her comfort and build rapport.

Say, “Today, I’m going to ask you some questions about your neighborhood and violent things that may happen in your neighborhood. I’m also going to ask you to draw two pictures. There are no right or wrong answers – just tell me what you think and try to tell me as much as you can so that I can learn about your experiences.

Remember, I will not put your name on the interview, so everything you say will be private. No one will be able to match your answers to you. You also cannot get in trouble for anything you say. If you tell me about something that happened in your neighborhood, please don’t use anyone’s last name. But if you do use someone’s last name by accident, don’t worry: I will rewind the recording and erase that part.

If you feel very uncomfortable answering any questions, you can just ask to move on to the next question. If the questions bother you too much, you can ask to stop, and that is okay. Also, if I notice that you become very sad or worried during the interview, I will tell a psychologist at your school or another adult you trust so that they can help you feel better. Remember, what I learn from you and other students can help other children deal with violence in their neighborhoods. Before we start, do you have any questions?” Answer any questions. “Okay, let’s begin!”

Follow up children's responses to the questions below with additional prompts or questions as necessary to clarify the response or obtain more details, including (but not limited to) the prompts listed (important prompts are listed beneath numbered questions).

Neighborhood Questions

1. Since we are going to talk about things that happen in your neighborhood, I first need to know what your neighborhood is like. Can you tell me the name of your neighborhood?
 - a. Is your school in your neighborhood, or a different neighborhood?
2. Most neighborhoods have good things and bad things. What are some things you like about your neighborhood?
3. What are some things you don't like about your neighborhood?
4. Give child blank sheet of paper and crayons. Can you please draw a picture of what scares you in your neighborhood?
 - a. Tell me about your picture. Prompt for additional details and ask specific questions about the content as necessary.

Violence Frequency & Chronicity

1. Now, I am going to ask some questions about violence that may happen in your neighborhood. What does "violence" mean to you?
2. When I say "violence," I mean things like people hurting other people, people using weapons, and people saying that they are going to hurt someone. When I ask about violence, I mean things that you have seen or experienced in real life, not violence in video games, on television, in movies, or in books or magazines. I am not asking about violence that may happen in your home, only violence that happens in your neighborhood.

How often do you see or experience neighborhood violence in your neighborhood? All of the time, some of the time, or just once in a while?

a. Every day? A few times per week? Once per week? Less?

3. Please give me an example of violence that usually happens once per week.

4. Give child blank sheet of paper and crayons. Please draw a picture of how you feel when you see violence in your neighborhood.

a. Tell me about your picture. Prompt for additional details and ask specific questions about the content as necessary.

5. Do you remember seeing or experiencing violence when you were younger?

6. How old were you?

7. Was it more scary or less scary when you were younger than it is now? Or the same?

8. Do you think neighborhood violence affects you now more than, less than, or the same as it used to?

a. In what way?

Violence Severity

1. Tell me about the worst or scariest violent event you have ever seen or experienced in your neighborhood.

a. When did this happen? How old were you?

b. Where did it happen?

c. How close is that to your home?

d. How close is that to your school?

e. Did you know the people involved?

f. Were you with anyone else when it happened?

- g. Did anyone get injured?
- h. What were the injuries?
- i. How often do things like this happen in your neighborhood?
- 2. Why was this the worst violent event you have seen or experienced?
- 3. How were you feeling while this event was happening?
- 4. How did you feel after it happened?
 - a. Does it still bother you?
 - b. In what way?
- 5. Did you do anything to try to make yourself feel better?
 - a. What did you do?
 - b. Did it help?
 - c. Did you do anything else?
- 6. Did you talk to anyone about it?
 - a. Who did you talk to?
 - b. Did talking about it help?
- 7. Have you ever been a victim of neighborhood violence? Remember, I am only asking about violence that happens in your neighborhood, not in your home or with your family.
 - a. Tell me about the worst time when that happened.
 - b. What was that like?
 - c. How did it make you feel?
 - d. What made you feel better?
- 8. Which is worse, being a victim of violence that's not too serious (such as a robbery) or seeing violence that is much more serious (like a murder)? Or are they the same?

- a. Why/how?
- b. How are the feelings you have different in those cases?

Vicarious Victimization

1. Have you ever seen or heard about neighborhood violence against a family member or close friend? Remember, I am only asking about violence that happens in your neighborhood, not in your home.
2. Tell me about the worst time you saw or heard about violence against a family member or a close friend.
 - a. Where did this happen?
 - b. Were you there when it happened?
 - c. Did you know the people who did the violence?
3. How did this make you feel?
4. How was this different from seeing or hearing about violence against strangers?

Political & Drug-related Violence

1. Do you ever see or hear about armed conflict or guerilla violence? You may have heard about violence like using bombs, kidnapping people, or wars between groups of people. For this question, it is okay to tell me about real-life violence you have seen on the news on TV or read in the newspaper or the internet, but please do not tell me about make believe violence from TV shows, movies, or video games.
2. How do you usually find out about this type of armed conflict/guerilla violence?
3. How often do you see or hear about armed conflict/guerilla violence? Every day, once per week, or only once in a while?
 - a. Does it ever bother you?

b. How often does it bother you?

4. Can you tell me about a time when you saw or heard about this type of armed conflict/guerilla violence?

a. Where did it happen?

b. How did you feel when you saw/heard about it?

5. Has anyone ever tried to get you involved in this type of violence?

a. Tell me what that was like.

6. For this question, too, it is okay to tell me about real-life violence you have seen on the news on TV or read in the newspaper or the Internet. Do you ever see or hear about violence that has to do with drugs or drug trafficking?

7. How do you usually find out about this type of drug-related violence?

8. How often do you see or hear about drug-related violence?

a. Does it ever bother you?

b. How often does it bother you?

9. Can you tell me about a time when you saw or heard about this type of violence?

a. Where did it happen?

b. How did you feel when you saw/heard about it?

10. Has anyone ever tried to get you involved in drug violence?

a. Tell me what that was like.

11. We've talked about several different types of violence – violence in your neighborhood, guerilla violence/armed conflict in your country, and drug-related violence.

Are there differences in how these different types of violence make you feel?

a. Like what?

Beliefs & Attitudes About Violence

1. Why do you think violence happens in your neighborhood?
2. Why do you think violence happens in your country?
3. Although most kids believe that violence is a bad thing, some kids may believe that there are some good things about violence. Do you believe there are any good things about violence in your neighborhood or your country?
 - a. Like what?
4. What do you think is the solution to violence in your neighborhood/country?
 - a. What do YOU need to help you deal with the violence in your neighborhood/country?
5. How would you help a new kid in your neighborhood deal with the violence in your neighborhood?
 - a. How would you help him/her feel better about violence he/she has seen/experienced?
6. Is there anything else you can tell me about the violence you see or experience in your neighborhood?
7. Do you have any questions for me?

After completing the interview, say, “Thank you for answering all of those questions! How are you feeling now? Did any of those questions bother you?” Assess participant’s emotional state. Provide student with resource list. Say, “Now let’s do something fun!” Engage in an enjoyable activity, such as playing a game or having a light conversation. Initiate referral process to school psychologist or other professional if necessary.